

14 September 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Final Session of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Tempus fugit, the Romans used to say, and they were right. Time flies: it is running out for us. And as time passes us by, so too do the opportunities for us to do what we must to ensure a fitting future for the coming generations.

Older persons, such as myself, are more aware of this reality. With one foot practically already in the grave, we seem to have a clearer understanding of the urgency; we know that we must not continue to delay taking essential steps to prevent the worst possible scenarios from becoming a reality. However, in this case, I do not believe that it is simply a matter of an old man's foolishness. For the world, time is definitely running out.

If we fail to make solidarity and a sense of social and environmental responsibility the main driving force behind our human society then, quite simply, we will not survive. The egoism, individualism, greed and exclusive national interests that characterize and drive human behaviour today can lead only to the extinction of our species. We are already heading down this path. At some point, it might not be possible to turn back.

One year ago, from this very rostrum, I shared with you the vision of what I hoped to achieve during my year in this high office, to which you, with such trust and affection, had elected me. Now the time has come to take stock.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude not only for your trust, but also for the generous cooperation afforded to me, including by many who did not disguise their concerns about me being a Catholic priest committed to the theology of liberation and to the liberation struggle of my people, led by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional in my country, Nicaragua. Fortunately, these doubts and suspicions did not prevent a frank and fraternal dialogue with those who would have been expected to oppose me most strongly. Today, as I step down, I am very happy and extremely grateful for all of the generous cooperation that I received from all of you without exception.

I would particularly like to express my deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, our dear brother Ban Ki-moon, with whom I have shared strong bonds of affection and sincere friendship since the start of my time in office. I am also grateful for the generosity shown by all of our bodies and specialized agencies in preparing me for the initial briefings and in providing me with the necessary cooperation for the holding of this sixty-third session, which we are concluding today.

Of course, the successful conclusion of this sixty-third session, which, I believe it would be no exaggeration to call one of the most turbulent in many years, would also have been impossible without the support and cooperation of the 27 vice-chairpersons and the excellent work of my Cabinet.

I am grateful to the entire Secretariat team and to the translators, security staff and general support staff who, in addition to fully discharging their duties, offered constant prayers to the Lord that everything would turn out well for us for the benefit of the most disadvantaged of our brothers and sisters around the world. This was always true of our dear sister Altagracia Rossi, the lift attendant; or security guard Ralph Herring, who always greets us all with a friendly smile at the Delegates' Entrance to the United Nations; or maintenance engineer Gregory Yanushkevich, who was always ready to shake my hand and to wish me good luck as I came in every morning. My sincerest appreciation goes to all of them and to their colleagues.

The most important months of my presidency occurred in the shadow of the current deep economic and financial crisis, which does not yet appear to have bottomed out. However, as an eighteenth century English philosopher once said, perhaps the carping of our worst critics sounds less triumphant when we observe that, while we did not accomplish as much as we would have liked, we nevertheless accomplished a great deal.

In accordance with article 13 of the United Nations Charter, the General Assembly "shall make recommendations for the purpose of promoting international cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, educational and health fields". However, for approximately the past 30 years, the Organization has been prevented from performing the role assigned to it by the Charter on the pretext that only the Bretton Woods institutions had expertise in these fields.

The work of my Presidential Commission of Experts made it clear that the General Assembly was indeed capable of bringing together specialists with sufficient expertise to discuss global financial, economic, monetary and trade governance. Furthermore, the Commission produced what is undoubtedly the most serious and complete proposal for how we should tackle the current global financial and economic crisis.

The adoption on 9 July of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development, held from 24 to 30 June 2009, was a historic milestone for the United Nations. The G-192 was thereby established as the most appropriate forum to address those issues that affect the international community as a whole.

The G-8 and the G-20 will continue to be significant minorities. However, this is more due to the fact that they are rich and powerful than to their demonstrated ability to do things well. We cannot and should not forget that, after all, it is because of the extremely grave errors committed by them, and the Bretton Woods institutions run by them, that the world is currently undergoing what could well turn out to be the worst crisis in history.

Extremely valuable inputs were made to the outcome document's conclusions as a result of the proposals put forward by the Commission of Experts chaired by Professor Stiglitz, the report issued by

the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and, of course, the statements delivered by Heads of State and Government at the plenary meeting of the Conference itself — for example, the excellent statement by President Rafael Correa of Ecuador — in addition to the comments made at round tables and working breakfasts.

However, we must also recognize that without the extraordinary support and active participation of non-governmental organizations and the South Center, headed by Martin Khor, we would not have made the progress that we did.

The draft outcome document, despite being negotiated by 192 countries and contrary to the fears expressed by some notable minorities, was not only ready two days before the Conference, but also comprehensively addressed a series of complex issues that went beyond the debates and documents arising from other forums.

It should also be noted that the outcome document of our historic June Conference finally launched the process of compliance with the recommendations contained in the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, entitled “A fair globalization”. This report states that “Globalization is making multilateralism both indispensable and inevitable” and that the multilateral system of the United Nations “is uniquely equipped to spearhead the process of reform of economic and social policies”.

The role of the United Nations in dealing with the most urgent issues of our time was institutionalized with the establishment on 31 July 2009 of the ad hoc open-ended working group of the General Assembly to follow up on the issues contained in the outcome document. Such issues include reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, the same “expert” institutions that have reduced the implementation of article 13 of the United Nations Charter as much as possible for the past three decades.

Today the most urgent issue continues to be the provision of resources to the most vulnerable countries, primarily in the form of donations, or, rather, the provision of compensation through a global fund, or of special drawing rights for development, in order to finance both public goods and the Millennium Development Goals.

It is precisely because of our failure to resolve the fundamental problems of the economic system, and the extreme poverty and inequality on which this system is based, that we have had to resort to palliative measures such as the Millennium Development Goals, or to press for the urgent implementation of the concept of the Responsibility to Protect. However necessary the Millennium Development Goals may be, they do not address the need for urgent and indispensable international economic reforms.

In the absence of the political will to tackle the serious injustices and inequalities facing the world, it is far more convenient to have recourse to the Responsibility to Protect in dealing with the consequences of such problems. Nevertheless, we should be satisfied that we have been able to comply with the provisions of paragraph 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which calls on the General Assembly to continue consideration of the Responsibility to Protect and its consequences.

Our panel on this issue was not only balanced but was also one of the most distinguished in the history of the United Nations, including intellectuals of the calibre of Noam Chomsky, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Jean Bricmont and former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans. The rich and comprehensive discussions clarified our understanding of this concept, which continues to be an important aspiration. However, great care will be needed to ensure that this concept is not interpreted or used, as so often in the past, as a right to intervene.

We are at a critical juncture on the path that we set out upon in San Francisco 64 years ago. The institutions established at that time, like all institutions, have undergone a natural, gradual and inevitable process of attrition. As a consequence, the present crisis is affecting both international economic governance and policy.

There is broad consensus that the United Nations Security Council is incapable of effectively addressing many crucial issues related to international peace and security and that it requires comprehensive reform in order to overcome the increasing limitations arising from its restrictive methods and narrow decision-making base. We have also taken important steps in this regard, and we have made progress with the implementation of decision 62/557 of 15 September 2008.

With regard to reform of the Security Council, I believe we can say that during the sixty-third session of the General Assembly we have turned a dream into a reality, since we have succeeded in moving the reform process from a study by the open-ended working group to the level of intergovernmental negotiations in informal plenary meetings.

Since the start of the negotiations in February, under the leadership of Ambassador Zahir Tanin of Afghanistan, we have held 32 meetings to consider specific issues. More than two thirds of Member States participated actively in these meetings and detailed proposals were also submitted, which clearly demonstrates the importance that Member States attach to this issue.

In May even more progress was made on this basis, with the negotiations receiving further encouragement by a document outlining the main options and a series of negotiable issues. A robust framework for subsequent negotiations has thereby been established. I am convinced that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Provided that we continue the negotiations and show a greater degree of commitment at the next session of the General Assembly, this process will shortly yield concrete results.

I am grateful to Ambassador Maria Fernanda Espinosa of Ecuador and Ambassador Morten Wetland of Norway for their excellent work as Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the revitalization of the General Assembly. Their efforts were a focused response to my longstanding call to prioritize the democratization of the United Nations.

Only a strong General Assembly which vigorously exercises its deliberative, policymaking and decision-making roles will be capable of enhancing multilateralism as the best option for relationships between States. It must be borne in mind that the most significant revitalization has been the capacity

demonstrated by the General Assembly to address existential economic problems that it had been unable to tackle for almost three decades. Revitalization is a political rather than a technical issue. I am also grateful to the Co-Chairs of the System-wide Coherence process, Ambassador Juan Antonio Yáñez-Barnuevo of Spain and Ambassador Kaire Mbuende of Namibia, for the progress achieved under their able guidance. Indeed, harmonized cooperation in line with the national plans of developing countries should continue to be a fundamental objective to ensure system-wide coherence of the United Nations through governance that is focused on the principles of transparency, inclusiveness and national ownership. These principles should, in turn, ensure that the forces of change are mobilized to achieve both gender equality at the global level and enhanced results at the national level.

Further efforts must therefore be resolutely pursued to secure an agreement between Member States on the need for a global institutional incentive to achieve gender equality. This will ensure that the women of the world have a strong and coherent voice within an effective structure.

For my part, I leave satisfied at having spared no effort conscientiously to fulfil my obligation to carry out the agenda of the sixty-third session and, at the same time, to ensure that the General Assembly remained attuned to events of international relevance not foreseen in the agenda, such as the Israeli aggression against Gaza, the global financial and economic crisis, or the recent coup d'état in Honduras, a stroke of luck for the pro-coup forces of the twenty-first century by which the international reactionaries tried to impede the victorious and promising advance of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. If we had had more time, we would have taken up as an agenda item in the General Assembly the serious threat to peace in Latin America posed by plans to build seven new United States military bases in Colombia, but regrettably the sixty-third session has run out of time. This theme will therefore have to wait until the next session, if the work of the General Assembly is to be kept in tune with events in our world.

As has happened with the Governments of many Member States, the magnitude and gravity of the global financial and economic crisis, the greatest crisis since the foundation of the United Nations, have occupied centre stage in our agenda during this past year, and have in fact prevented us from considering, to the extent we would have preferred, such other issues as nuclear disarmament, the situation in Palestine, decolonization and the extremely dangerous and illegal concept of preventive war, which has nothing to do with that of "pre-emptive war", despite the fact that, regrettably, we use the same word in Spanish to refer to these two essentially and critically different concepts.

We would also have liked to have considered the so-called war on terror in greater depth in our agenda. Most salient in that regard is the universally condemned case of the five Cuban heroes, unjustly and arbitrarily detained for exactly 11 years and two days, and subsequently condemned to serve heavy prison terms for having brought to light, in Miami, terrorist schemes against the heroic and ever-supportive Republic of Cuba. Despite the fact that the information was duly provided to the authorities of our host country, who have continuously claimed to have no knowledge of it, the response was to jail them. It is to be hoped that with the much-touted change and rectification policy of the new Government of the host country, there will be a correction of this miscarriage of justice, which has caused so much suffering to the five families affected and so much damage to the image of the United States that its new president is committed to improving.

My greatest frustration this year has been the Palestine situation. The Question of Palestine continues to be the most serious and prolonged unresolved political and human rights issue on the agenda of the United Nations since its inception. The evident lack of commitment for resolving it is a scandal that has caused me much sorrow.

I promised a proactive Presidency, and sincerely believe that I did everything I possibly could in this regard, requesting and attempting to persuade those who should have been most closely involved to call for the convocation of the General Assembly to consider the Palestine situation. However, whether at the time of the three-week invasion of Gaza that began on 27 December or now, all I received was advice to give the process more time, because things were always on the point of being resolved and we should do nothing that could endanger the success that was always just beyond our reach. Faced with this situation, I sincerely did not know what to do. I wanted to help Palestine, but those who should supposedly have been most interested denied their support for reasons of “caution” that I was incapable of understanding. I hope that they were right and that I was wrong. Otherwise, we face an ugly situation of constant complicity with the aggression against the rights of the noble and long-suffering Palestinian people.

A just resolution of the Question of Palestine must be based on the content of international law, and will only be attained when the unity of the Palestinian people has been achieved and the international community speaks with all its representatives who enjoy credibility and have been democratically elected. In addition to the withdrawal of the Israelis from all territories illegally occupied since 1967, international law demands that all Palestinians displaced during the creation of the State of Israel, their children and grandchildren, be permitted to return to their homeland of Palestine.

My chief consultant on humanitarian affairs, Dr. Kevin Cahill, was sent to Gaza from 17 to 22 February to prepare a report on the humanitarian situation in Gaza immediately after the aggression. Dr. Cahill’s report was issued on Wednesday 19 August, on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day commemorating the sacrifices of United Nations staff in conflict zones; it had originally been intended for release at a Special Session on Gaza, but that did not take place for the reasons mentioned.

I find disgraceful the passivity and apparent indifference of some highly influential members of the Security Council to the fact that the blockade of Gaza has continued uninterrupted for two years, in flagrant violation of international law and of the resolution of the Security Council itself, causing immense damage and suffering to the Palestinian population of Gaza. This situation threatens to become even more serious if immediate measures are not taken, now that winter is approaching. Now is the time to demonstrate, with actions and not simply words, a true commitment to the concept of the Responsibility to Protect.

It would be inappropriate for me to leave without sharing with you what I feel is the main lesson or perception I have gained during this year of work, dedication and total commitment to the cause of peace through the democratization of the United Nations; the revitalization of the General Assembly; the complete abolition of nuclear weapons by the year 2020, the 75th anniversary of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the eradication of poverty and hunger, which this year passed the psychological barrier of a billion people suffering hunger throughout the world; the taking

of measures to ensure the availability of clean water and food for all; the promotion of effective policies for dealing with climate change; putting an end to the crime of human trafficking, as well as to the disgrace of the ill treatment of and discrimination against women; guaranteeing the right to education for children and youths, including that of girls and boys in situations of armed combat or humanitarian disasters caused by natural phenomena; as well as guaranteeing universal access to health, which is an ethical and religious imperative.

In all these endeavours, the ongoing counsel of Brother David Andrews of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, as well as of Maude Barlow, Mohamed Bedjaoui, Byron Blake, Leonardo Boff, Noam Chomsky, Ramsey Clark, Michael Clark, Kevin Cahill, Aldo Díaz Lacayo, François Houtart, Michael Kennedy, Francisco Lacayo Parajón, Carlos Emilio López, Paul Oquist, Nuripan Sen, Joseph Stiglitz and Oscar-René Vargas, was of great use to this Presidency, which we intended to be a team effort from the beginning. However, clearly, our greatest gratitude is to God, our Lord, for having allowed us to contribute in some small way to the cause of world peace.

During this year, there was much talk of the need to reform the United Nations and to do everything possible to improve its image, credibility and effectiveness. According to data from the latest poll by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes project, carried out in 24 nations and the Palestinian Territories, there has been a noticeable improvement in the perception of the United Nations. This gives us happiness, but not satisfaction. Much remains to be done if the United Nations is to become worthy of the prestige, trust and credibility it needs to carry out its mission effectively, a mission that is so important in today's troubled world.

It is said that the League of Nations failed because those who sponsored it lacked the power or will needed to make it a reality. I believe that something similar can be said of the United Nations. I am one of those who believe that the United Nations has the potential as an organization to be indispensable to humanity's efforts to survive the crises converging to threaten its extinction. The main problem, without a doubt, is that not all its founders really believed, or believe even today, in the vision or principles explicit and implicit in its underlying Charter.

I believe that it is not far-fetched to note that the whole world knows that, among many other truths, some of our most powerful and influential Member States definitely do not believe in the rule of law in international relations and are of the view, moreover, that complying with the legal norms to which we formally commit, when signing the Charter, is something that applies only to weak countries. With such a low level of commitment, it should not be surprising that the United Nations has been unable to achieve the main objectives for which it was created.

Certain Member States think that they can act according to the law of the jungle, and defend the right of the strongest to do whatever they feel like with total and absolute impunity, and remain accountable to no one. They think nothing of railing against multilateralism, proclaiming the virtues of unilateralism while simultaneously pontificating unashamedly from their privileged seats on the Security Council about the need for all Member States conscientiously to fulfil their obligations under the Charter, or be sanctioned (selectively of course) for failing to do so. The sovereign equality of all Member States and the obligation to prevent wars are, for them, minor details that need not be taken very seriously.

All of this, and many other equally serious anomalies, is what has brought many to believe in the urgency of the need to reform the United Nations. But during this year as President of the General Assembly, I have come to the conclusion that the time has already passed for reforming or mending our Organization. What we need to do is to reinvent it, and we need urgently to do it *ad majorem gloriam Dei*, which is to say, for the good of the Earth and of humanity.

In the 64 years since the creation of the United Nations, there have been many scientific advances and development in the ethical consciousness of mankind that allow us to clarify the main elements of this other world, possible and indispensable for our survival, and to proceed on that basis to the drafting of a proposed Declaration on the Common Good of the Earth and Humanity. Once the consensus of Member States has been obtained on this Declaration, this shared vision will have to be converted into a draft for a new Charter of the United Nations, one that is attuned to the needs and knowledge of the twenty-first century.

Our dear brother Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and our brother and liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, have helped us understand, in a more integral and holistic form, man's place in creation and his relation to Mother Earth. We understand that the Earth and humanity are part of a vast, evolving universe, possessing the same destiny, and threatened by destruction as a result of the irresponsibility and recklessness of human beings.

We now understand that ties exist linking all living beings because we all carry the same basic genetic code that underlies the sacred unity of life in all its many forms. We are more clearly aware that all human beings, with their cultures, traditions, religions, arts and visions of the world, make up a unique family of brothers and sisters with equal dignity and equal rights. We are impelled toward a new culture, a culture of cooperation that will replace the culture of competition. Our goal should be living well, not living better. This means living in harmony with the cycles of Mother Earth and of the cosmos, and in balance with all that exists.

We now know, or, perhaps I should say are more aware than ever, that Mother Nature provides us with everything necessary for life, and that natural life, including human life, depends on a healthy biosphere, capable of maintaining and preserving water, forests, animals and innumerable micro-organisms. But we are also more aware than ever of the precarious situation of human life and of the capacity of the Earth to support life.

Human beings, who have become the principal predators of nature and the greatest enemies of life, have begun a process that is quickly depriving us of all direction. It is the primary cause of the climate change that is without a doubt the most serious and urgent of all the multiple and converging crises that currently threaten the extinction of the human species. To be effective, our response to climate change must be immediate and forceful. In terms of economic resources, at least 1 per cent of the GDP of the entire world will be required. The major culprits will have to bear the costs in proportion to their responsibility for the problem.

All of this knowledge and awareness of the real and serious threats to life must have practical consequences in our behaviour and in our conduct with respect to the common good of the Earth and

humanity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is, to date, the most we have been able jointly to achieve here at the United Nations, although obviously to have an effect, this Declaration must be put into practice, must be conscientiously respected throughout the world, and must continue to be perfected as human consciousness becomes more sensitive and discovers rights hitherto unrecognized as such.

Nevertheless, it is no longer enough to speak only of human rights. The knowledge afforded us by science obliges us to adopt a more holistic and integral vision, because we know that we are, together with the Earth and nature, an indivisible whole. As already stated, we must adopt a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of the Earth and Humanity as the first indispensable step for reinventing the United Nations. It must be remembered that we either behave as we should, serving Mother Earth instead of having her serve us, and mutually loving and serving one another, or we all perish! That is the simple truth. *Tempus fugit*. Time is running out. In Copenhagen we will have the opportunity to show that we understand well what that means and that we are determined to do what is needed to defend life.

Thank you.